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ABSTRACT

No culture in the world's history has been so consumed with controlling the future's course, and conversely, so unconcerned with discovering meaning from the past. The provocative challenge of a future which will bring fulfillment to the American educational system is compelling. The future for school library media programs must amount to something more than an honoring of past traditions. Predicting the course of school library media programs in the decade ahead requires a commitment to common sense, a dedication to patience and good judgement, and a preoccupation with developing a consensus which leads to accommodation. Growing access to and use of commercial information data bases and computerized data bases of cataloguing and bibliographic information will accelarate within schools. The growth of cable television will spark an information explosion which will culminate with the acceptance of television into its proper educational role. (JN)

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EDUCATION AND MEDIA IN THE 1980'S

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Projecting the future of education in general and that of school library media programs specifically for the decade which lies ahead presents an irresistible temptation, although it is doubtlessly an impossible undertaking if prescience is expected. The Future! How to control it, to shape it and bend it to our will through scientific research and applied technology is a uniquely American preoccupation. Possibly no culture in the world's history has been so consumed with controlling the future's course and conversely, so unconcerned with discovering meaning from the past. Until recently our fixation with controlling the future could be indulged to the fullest, and one certainty shaped this process; this being that the future would be a certain extrapolation of the past and, with only temporary pauses for minor adjustments, the future unerringly carried with it, much as seeds to create an exact replication are carried in floating dandelion fluff, the capacity to reproduce itself. And for certain the future would be ever better, ever more prosperous and ever more beneficent in the gifts it bestowed. This was a certainty of life, indeed believing so formed the nucleus of the American Dream.

Just when the American ethos changed from one of absolute acceptance that the future was something to be rushed toward and anticipated eagerly, to one of uncertainty and even fear about what the future held is unclear. The dividing line which separates skepticism from cynicism is rarely that obvious. Clearly, the decade of the seventies which saw three economic recessions, pernicious inflation, two oil crises and a continuing world energy crisis, along with the Watergate induced Constitutional crisis and the final disaster of Vietnam have indelibly etched themselves onto the wax tablet of the national consciousness. With the sureness of Iago accosting Othello, uncertainty and a general lack of optimism about the future shadow our steps toward it. Fear, like a metastizing malignancy eats away at our hopes for what the future will bring, and for the first time, the future is viewed by many Americans as just plain dangerous. Our absolute belief in our ability to control the future, at least in a technological sense,

2 SP 016 961

has been replaced with a kind of damage-control mentality whereby in deciding what is to be done we seek out the least bad way to manage our problems.

So much for the influential negatives which shape our lives now. Pollsters, interviewers, opinion shapers, the general vox populi confirms that these darker emotions are pervasively present now. The gravest danger this presents is that, as Franklin D. Roosevelt so persuasively argued, we react to every situation with a loss of purpose and confidence. The future must not become something to be viewed preeminently as "dangerous", nor can fatalism become the measure of our spirit. There is danger too, in that the more we fear the less we will apprehend of the future, with decreasing numbers of persons developing the aptitudes and abilities to deal well with its challenges.

Wherever there is great risk and danger there exists too, splendid opportunity and enormous potential for innovation, creativity and excellence. Seen thus, the provocative challenge of a future which will bring brilliant fulfillment to the American educational system is equally compelling. This ratio of high risk to great potential success is clearly influencing the field of educational media programs as we enter the nineteen eighties. Never have the issues of what school library media programs should be or must become been clearer, nor the talent to fulfill these expectations successfully needed more. This is true though for all of education to which school library media programs are inextricably linked. The potential variety of library media program offerings for the 1980's is protean, and the need for profoundly original thinking to be brought to bear on the sorting and sifting process this task inevitably demands is self evident.

The future for school library media programs must amount to something more than a slavish honoring of past traditions. Yet, predicting with precision what new ways must be adopted and which old ways retained, and the consequences of these decisions is a mighty tricky business. It is tempting to toss ideas about what the future will be around like frisbies, and with the same light weight effect this

is a pleasant if useless diversion. And predictions about what the future may or will be can sound authoritative and be extravagant in their persuasion, yet have their value quickly foreshortened by time's passage. Following this course finds the air thick with promiscuous promises, while a host of visionary prophets are quick to share with us the opinions upon which their facts are based.

How to strike the balance between a rational and unhyped view of the future and crazy far out guessing is not easy, for warmed by the conviction of our own beliefs, frequently we go too far. Predicting the course of school library media programs in the decade ahead requires, above all else, a commitment to common sense, a dedication to patience and good judgment, and a preoccupation with developing a consensus which leads to accomodation, all commodities the demand for which always exceeds the supply thereof.

Certain developments in school library media programs and the directions they will take are already evident, and these developments will doubtlessly become well established in the 1980's. One thing is certain, this is that technology, as applied to technical services and instructional programs, will become indispensable to the school library media program. Especially in the technical service area of library media program management will technology assert its usefulness. As a national bibliographic control system is brought finally to both the audiovisual and print world access to computerized data bases of cataloging and bibliographic information, as well as the production of cataloging cards and book catalogs, will become commonplace in the school library media program. This alone will redeem professionals from countless hours of unnecessary and usually ineffective labor as they catalog and process the mountains of instructional materials necessary to the library media program. The time saved will be used to better effect in serving the learning needs of students, teachers, administrators and citizens who seek or need the instructionl services the program provides.

Computer access to other information data bases will allow library media specialists to avoid much of the essential but time consuming reference questions of the "where-do-I-find" or "in-what-book?" nature; questions which are so much a part of the day but whose repetitiveness and low learning value impair the efficiency and effectiveness of many school library media programs. Quick and easy reference questions and information needs such as information retrieval skills, may be stored in a data base, called up by the user and used as often as needed, much as we now sort through the card catalog or encyclopedia to find this or that isolated piece of information.

On a more sophisticated instructional level, growing access to and use of commercial information data bases will accelerate within schools, and new and highly useful computerized data bases for elementary and middle school users will be developed. Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) whereby the computer is harnessed to perform the tedious but essential task of memorization or repetitious mastery level skill and drill work will be abundantly available and frequently used within the library media center. Until now, the history of computer use within the schools has been perfectly consistent with the historic patterns shown in the development and use of the hardware of technology for the past century. This being that the hardware to deliver technolgy (in this case the computer) far outstripped our ability to program useful or intellectually credible programs (the software if you will), to use with it. These paths now converge, demand meets need and expectation, and early in this decade the software of learning and the hardware to deliver this learning efficiently and effectivioly will finally achieve equity. That this development will be highly profitable commercially is assured, guaranteeing its widespread use within the school library media program.

Technology as used within the library media program's instructional program component will become abundantly available too, through a vastly increased commitment by all kinds of libraries to the practice of networking or resource sharing. On the one hand, the application of technology to media programs will lower their per pupil cost making available vast treasure houses of information, at significantly reduced costs. On the other hand large capital investment is required to obtain the hardware and the programs created by advanced technology, even though this expense has decreased in cost or held steady as minaturized components made possible through solid state circuitry have reduced bulk while increasing efficiency and information delivery. Access to this world of the future is expensive. Programs created through regional associations or cooperative service compacts among various kinds of library and information systems will serve a dual purpose ; for by pooling human and material resources and sharing financial investment and risks, information services will be made available which no single school district or building could heretofore have afforded. Networking means too, that complimentary information programs consisting of public, special, college and research and any other kinds of libraries and information agencies now operating, will increasingly transcend the bonds of service to an exclusive client group and provide services and programs to a greatly expanded population. Planning by government agencies and funding to support these plans will encourage these developments, and it is likely that Federal and State Law will even mandate these information networks.

Well established by now too, is that the numbers of the traditional clients for school library media programs, children in the five to eighteen year old range, have diminished precipitously and this will continue into the coming decade. Additions to these numbers or replacements must be found from a variety of other user/clients who form a broad age range from eighteen months until death. Preschool and day-care programs, senior citizen education programs and special interest

groups concerned about such matters as health care, nutritition and leisure time learning will be recruited into using community schools. Schools will present aggressive community outreach programs, partly because of the remarkably resilient and tenacious survival instincts which all institutions display, and partly because now is the right time for this to happen. The educational system's responsibility to attend to the educational needs of widely varied multitude of citizens with different needs and expectations is increasingly defined through Judicial, Executive and Legislative fiat, and it mirrors as well a genuine commitment by the educational system to play its essential and historic role within the democratic system. Each group served though generates its own demands for specialized services and programs. In many cases this will be a matter of old wine for new bottles, for user needs and their expectations for information will not vary that wildly from what has gone before or should already be happening in the school library media program. What will happen is that materials, equipment and personnel will be used in a number of ways and with a variety of disparate users with special individual group needs. But when has this truism not been the hallmark of excellent program planning and innovative library media services?

Other special or single interest groups will place escalating demands for additional or first time information service upon school library media programs. It has already been noted that many of the services these "specials" expect or require must be provided because of Federal/state fiat or judicial decisions. The large scale intervention by all levels of government into American education has recently forced schools to provide "free and appropriate educational programs and services" to such varied groups of learners as the mentally and physically handicapped, the gifted and talented, bilingual, English as a second language (ESL), or other special need groups. There are no signs that the pace of this intervention will slacken, given the litigation prone and contentious civil rights postures

assumed now by most advocacy groups. If anything, as one special interest group see its needs satisfied, or at least responded to through government intervention, other special interest groups join the fray with intensified determination and a willful purpose to have their way.

Clearly, each of these events and others not anticipated, will have an impact upon the professional preparation received by those entering school library media program work. For example, as the need for narrowly focused technical expertise---how to catalog, how to locate special reference books, how to teach mechanical library skills---becomes achievable through the application of programs provided by the wizardry of solid-state circuitry to teaching and technical services, new professional requirement will be called for from library media specialist. Now this professional must become a highly skilled program planner and manager; an outstanding teacher and a leader of other teachers as a staff developer; persuasive at coaxing school administrators to adopt new ways or adapt the old to meet new expectations, and a community change agent able to anticipate and serve the needs of new and different users. All of this requires that library education change the focus of its preparation progr..ms. It has been long apparent that in library education too much time goes to preparing school library media specialists to do jobs which are unnecessary or to perform obsolete services. This must change; for it is one thing to evolve into a dinosaur and disappear for lack of adaptability, it is quite another venture to continue to produce dinosaurs designed exclusively for failure.

Emerging in the late seventies and foreseeable as a distinct and energetic shaping force in the eighties was a rediscovered commitment by professional groups associated with the American Library Association (ALA), groups such as the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), The Young Adult Service Division (YASD) and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) to develop a coalition whose purpose aimed to preserve, to protect and to extend the rich

tradition of library services to children and youth, especially those associated with the school and public library, from further erosions or outright dismanteling. Partly this reflects a hunker-down and pull-the-wagons into-a-circle mentality, something that is bound to show when times are tough, as they surely are in the late seventies. But it is appropriate too, to see the formation of this coalition as an effort to enrich and extend library media programs and services to children and youth. It is a healthy development that, while the technology we have described here will deliver unparallel new information services and media programs to our youth, its ultimate value should be to the enrichment of our culture and democratic traditions. Its true value will be reckoned for the humanizing and civilizing effect it has upon the human condition.

The growth of cable television alone in the 1980's will multiple in a geometric kind of information explosion the potential which television has to educate rather than sedate. Broad band access to channels devoted exclusively to news analysis, art appreciation, music, theater, sports, bilingual education, foreign language, cooking, nutrition, preventive health care---the list is limited really only by our imaginations and nothing else---will be abundantly available, commercially profitable and of transcendant importance in shaping the very nature of what education is to be. Define then if you will a school, or a public library or a school library media center. Impossible. Yet these are matters which deal with information, access to it and its use by our citizens and are tradition concerns to all librarians.

School library media programs for the eighties--all library media programs for the eighties--will be capacious and increasingly complex. That these programs will be developed and put into service during an era immediately ahead which portends little more than the crisis times of the past, to which we are both accustomed and inured to coexisting with is accepted. Is it possible to do this? Our answer must be yes! Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked "Can anyone

remember when the times were not hard and money not scarce?" What a remarkably accurate if uncomfortably real expression of our times. They emphasize the core of truth which is found at the heart of all cliches, indeed, 'the more things change, the more they remain the same."

This essay, as essays of this sort do, raises far more issues, challenges and questions than it provides answers to or responses for. The lack of definite answers to difficult questions about what the future will be, or of predictable responses or solutions to problems assoicated with that future is a fact of life; one we either learn to live with or surrender to in despair. This is true too, in the library media programs as they seek the best way to establish their proper role within American education during the decade of the eighties. But they will do this, their options being the same, to change or be rendered obsolete through an inability to accept this change which is an inevitable accomplishment of times passage.

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